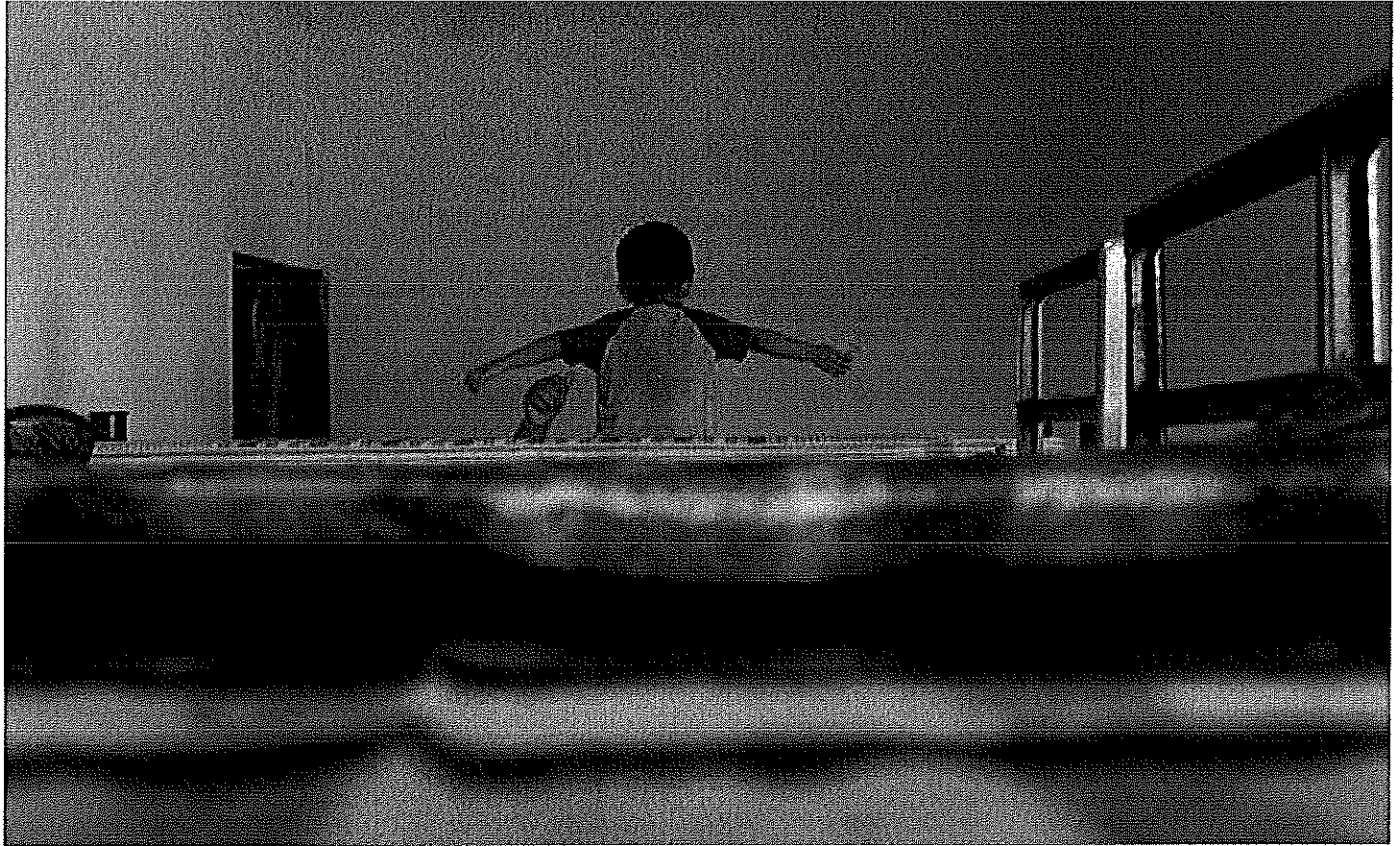
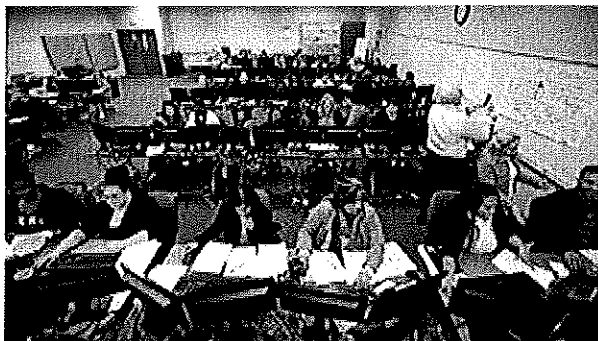


# Improved parenting may fortify low-income kids against poverty effects

July 21, 2014 LA Times



For children growing up in poverty, the seeds of poor health in adulthood appear to be sown early. But a nurturing parent may be able to foster a child's resilience to such conditions as allergies, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers, says a new study.



In a new study based on surveys of more than 1,300 government workers in Tennessee, black workers were less likely than white workers to say they felt supported by their coworkers. They also reported having fewer friends at work. And black workers in the study were more likely to report... ( Emily Alpert Reyes )



A new study that zeroed in on a single city in Michigan found that where men are scarce, youth were more likely to commit assaults. ( Emily Alpert Reyes )

After a decade during which rates of childhood poverty in the United States have risen steadily, an estimated 16 million American kids--22% of all children in the U.S.--live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (\$23,550 for a family of four). Helping parents struggling to feed and clothe their children to be caring and attentive as well would seem to be a good idea to begin with; if such efforts made children more likely to live free of chronic diseases, that "could pay long-term social, public health and economic dividends," the authors wrote.

The article was published Monday in the journal PNAS. Among its authors are Gene H. Brody, director of the University of Georgia's center for family research, who helped devise the Strong African American Families Project, whose curriculum has been adopted by agencies in Georgia, California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Washington, D.C.

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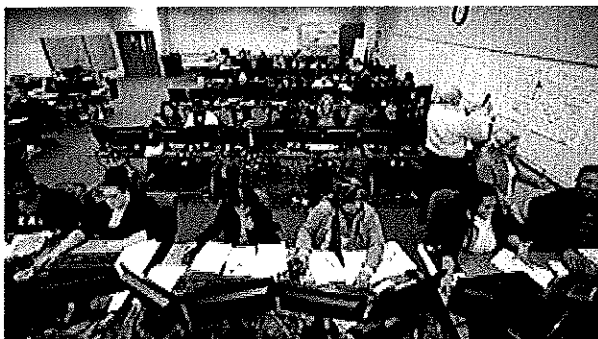
Eight years after their mothers took classes to promote nurturing parenting, low-income children showed much lower levels of inflammation than did their peers whose mothers got no such training. (Rebecca Blackwell)

**By MELISSA HEALY contact the reporter**

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Inflammation is linked to many health ills, so steps that lower the measure years later could be protective  
 Even when a child grows out of poverty, the circumstances of her childhood put her health at higher risk  
 Do better parents make healthier offspring? A study says it's possible

For children growing up in poverty, the seeds of poor health in adulthood appear to be sown early. But a nurturing parent may be able to foster a child's resilience to such conditions as allergies, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers, says a new study.



To gauge the lasting health effects of good parenting, the latest research returned to rural Georgia eight years after researchers completed their first clinical trial of a seven-week program called the Strong African American Families Project. Of the 667 African American mothers and their children who participated in that trial, researchers returned to 272 of the child subjects, who were by now 19 to 20 years old. They collected blood samples and measured those samples for signs of systemic inflammation.

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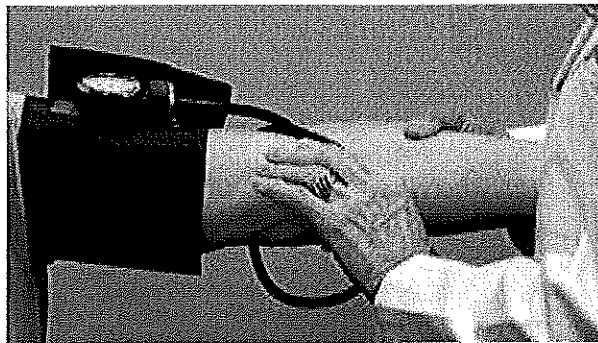
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The researchers were looking for levels of six immune system proteins that set the stage for chronic, low-grade inflammation in a body, which in turn contributes to such conditions as obesity, insulin resistance, coronary heart disease, depression and drug abuse. They wondered whether the children of mothers who had gotten the seven-week parenting program had lower levels of these inflammatory markers than did the offspring of mothers who had been assigned to the clinical trial's control group. Those moms received only a family assessment, but got none of the training in limit-setting, problem-solving and communication with their pre-teen child that mothers in the intervention group got.



A crushing medical bill can cause money problems not just for a cash-strapped patient but for his or her entire family. New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show more than one in four U.S. families recently experienced a financial burden due to the cost of medical care. ( Karen Kaplan )

Eight years after their mothers had participated in the trial, the young adults whose mothers had received the parent training had levels of inflammatory markers that were significantly lower than those of mothers who got no such training. The difference was most dramatic in the young adults whose families were most disadvantaged. And the gap was most striking when the parenting of the participating mother had been judged highly improved by the training.

All of this suggests not only that a positive parenting program makes parents better at listening and responding to a child: as that child grows into adulthood, his mental and physical health alike may be improved by having had a better parent.

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The authors underscore, of course, that they have fallen far short of proving that better parenting drives down the heightened risk of heart disease, metabolic abnormalities and psychiatric disease among those who grew up poor: that would take many more years of study to discern. But since the inflammatory biomarkers they measured contribute to such ills, they reason, anything that drives those levels down is likely to improve health outcomes down the road.